

Protest in front of the Council of Europe Headquarters

January 23rd, 2017

23 January the Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety (IRFS), in cooperation with Strasbourg-based Azerbaijani activists, organised a protest outside the Palace of Europe. The Palace of Europe in Strasbourg France is the home of the Council of Europe. The protesters demanded that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) put an end to corruption and lobbying practices, appoint a rapporteur for political prisoners and suspend voting rights for the Azerbaijani delegation.

To Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

Council of Europe
Avenue de l'Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
FRANCE

16 January 2017

We are writing with a view to the criminal case against the former Vice President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Mr. Luca Volonte, who is being investigated by the Milan public prosecutor's office for allegedly accepting €2.39m in bribes from two members of PACE, Mr. Elkhan Suleymanov and Mr. Muslim Mammadov, in exchange for his efforts to thwart the 2013 critical resolution on political prisoners in Azerbaijan.

We urge you to immediately expel the two members of the Azerbaijani delegation accused of bribing other members (Elkhan Suleymanov and Muslim Mammadov), pending a full investigation. Furthermore, we urge you to suspend the voting rights of the entire Azerbaijani delegation, which we believe were completely aware of the bribery but failed to take a single step to stop it.

The European Stability Initiative's report: The European Swamp (Caviar Diplomacy Part 2) – Prosecutors, Corruption and the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly [1] as well as the investigation conducted by the Italian broadcaster RAI reveal shameful details of the corruption scam.

To this end, the 2013 vote on Mr. Christoph Strässer's resolution may not be considered legitimate. As a matter of urgency, PACE should immediately re-establish the mandate of a special rapporteur on political prisoners in Azerbaijan – a credible member of PACE with a solid record of scrutinising and reporting on human rights abuses – to write an objective report, in cooperation with the Council of Europe INGO conference experts and internationally-recognised rights watchdogs.

We recall that, in 2014, PACE, through its Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights (AS Jur) decided to proceed with a separate report titled "Azerbaijan's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe: What follow-up on respect for human rights". Since then, there has been no meaningful follow-up after the 2014 decision. In the most recent example, neither the AS Jur rapporteur nor his colleagues at the Monitoring Committee, and not even the PACE

leadership, reacted to the harsh ten-year sentences handed down by a court in Azerbaijan to young political activists Giyas Ibrahimov and Bayram Mammadov, along with allegations of ill-treatment during their detention. To the contrary, the European Union immediately issued a statement, in which they called the sentences “particularly worrying [2]”.

On 18 November 2016, the highest court in Azerbaijan considered the appeal by the Azerbaijani political prisoner and opposition leader Mr. Ilgar Mammadov against his seven-year long prison sentence and ruled to uphold it. The continued illegal imprisonment of Mr. Mammadov constitutes a blatant breach of Azerbaijan’s explicit legal obligations, and is an affront to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which has repeatedly demanded that Azerbaijan comply with the 2014 decision by the European Court of Human Rights and immediately and unconditionally release Ilgar Mammadov. Contrary to the Committee of Ministers, which is now considering legal action against Azerbaijan, PACE has failed to take a decisive action against such a flagrant and persistent violation of the Convention and of the principles on which it is founded, including respect for the binding judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

To this end, we call on PACE to eliminate any trace of corruption and misconduct within the Pan-European human rights organisation, and to demonstrate a strong and consolidated stance on human rights violations in Azerbaijan.

Specifically, we urge you do the following:

- · {C} Immediately expel the two members of the Azerbaijani delegation accused of bribing other members (Elkhan Suleymanov and Muslim Mammadov), pending a full investigation.
- · {C} Suspend the voting rights of the entire Azerbaijani delegation, pending a full investigation into the corruption and until Ilgar Mammadov and other political prisoners have been released.
- · {C} Re-establish the mandate of a special rapporteur on political prisoners in Azerbaijan – a credible member of PACE with a solid record of scrutinising and reporting on human rights abuses – to write an objective report in cooperation with the Council of Europe INGO conference experts and internationally-recognised rights watchdogs.
- · {C} Call for an urgent debate on the corruption scam within the Council of Europe; appoint a special ethical commission to investigate alleged involvement of the other members of PACE in the bribery case.

Thank you for considering this important matter.

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Undersigned:

- 1. Intigam Aliyev, Chairman, Legal Education Society
- 2. Rasul Jafarov, human rights defender
- 3. Khadija Ismayilova, investigative journalist
- 4. Leyla Yunus, Director, Institute for Peace and Democracy
- 5. Mehman Aliyev, Director, Turan Information Agency
- 6. Annaghi Hajibayli, Chairman, Azerbaijani Lawyers Association
- 7. Asabali Mustafayev, President, Democracy and Human Rights Resource Center
- 8. Gubad Bayramov (Ibadoghlu), Chairman, Public Initiatives Center
- 9. Avaz Zeynalli, Editor-in-chief, Khural newspaper
- 10. Ogtay Gulaliyev, Coordinator, Public Alliance “Azerbaijan Without Political Prisoners”
- 11. Khalid Baghirov, lawyer
- 12. Khalig Bahadir, journalist
- 13. Natig Jafarli, Executive secretary, Republican Alternative Movement
- 14. Shahin Hajiyevev, Editor, Turan Information Agency

15. Fariz Namazov, attorney
16. Nemat Karimli , attorney
17. Hafiz Babali, Deputy chairman, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
18. Hakimeldostu Mehdiyev, journalist
19. Bashir Suleymanli, Director, Institute for Citizens' Rights
20. Samira Aghayeva, lawyer
21. Parvin Guliyev, Youth Club public union
22. Zaur Akbar, President, Youth Atlantic Treaty Association
23. Ruslan Mustafayev, lawyer
24. Latafat Malikova, Chairwoman , Regional Human Rights and Education Center
25. Ulvi Hasanli, NIDA Civic Movement
26. Ilgar Taghi, brother of murdered journalist Rafig Taghi, human rights activist
27. Ilgar Gasimov, Legal Aid Public Union, Chairman
28. Mehman Huseynov, Chairman, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
29. Elchin Hasanzade, journalist
30. Ramiz Guliyev, journalist, former political prisoner
31. Elshan Hasanov, Chairman, Monitoring Centre for Political Prisoners
32. Fargana Novruzova, journalist
33. Yashar Aghazade, lawyer
34. Emin Huseynov, Co-founder, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
35. Rashid Hajili, Director, Media Rights Institute
36. Alovzat Aliyev, Director, LEQAT LLC
37. Tahmina Taghiyeva, journalist
38. Gullu Jahangirova, human rights activist
39. Jasur Mammadov, Director, Caspian Defense Studies Institute
40. Lachin Mamishov, journalist
41. Elchin Mammad, Chairman, Public Association "Legal Education of Sumgayit Youth"
42. Orkhan Mammad, journalist, Meydan TV
43. Emin Aslanov, lawyer
44. Fikrat Huseynli, journalist, Azadliq newspaper
45. Arif Mammadov, Co-chairman, Democracy for Azerbaijan
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